

Bolsonaro endorses Trump coup, threatens to do same in Brazil's 2022 election

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Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, one of Donald Trump's most fervent international supporters, has unequivocally endorsed the January 6 coup attempt in Washington. He has already announced his intention to use the same lies about electoral fraud in Brazil to mobilize his supporters in a bid to remain in power, whatever the results of the 2022 presidential elections.

In his typical contemptuous fashion, Bolsonaro declared on the evening of January 6, in response to the US developments: "I followed everything. You know I'm connected to Trump. You know my answer. Now, [there have been] a lot of fraud charges, a lot of fraud charges." He then repeated his own unsubstantiated claims about the 2018 election in Brazil: "Mine was defrauded. I have proof of it. I should have won in the first round."

On the next day, he vowed to attempt his own putsch in 2022, should he lose the presidential elections. He told his supporters: "What was the problem [in the US]? Lack of trust in the vote. So there, the people voted and the mail vote was boosted because of the so-called pandemic, and some people voted three, four times, dead people voted." He concluded with a roadmap for his coup: "If we don't have printed ballots in 2022, some means to audit the vote, we are going to have a problem worse than in the United States."

His reaction to the events in Washington contrasted with the condemnations issued by the leaders of the Brazilian Congress and Electoral Court, whose head, Supreme Court Justice Luís Roberto Barroso, was an observer of the US elections. Outgoing House Speaker, Rio de Janeiro representative Rodrigo Maia, tweeted: "The invasion of the US Congress by extremists represents a desperate act by an antidemocratic tendency which lost the elections. It is ever more clear that the only path is democracy, with dialogue and respecting the Constitution." Justice Barroso struck a stronger tone: "In the sad US episode, fascist supporters showed their true face: antidemocratic and violent. Good people, regardless of ideology, don't support barbarism. I hope the American society and institutions react with vigor to this threat to democracy."

In an ominous indication that preparations for a coup in Brazil are well advanced and count with the support of the US far-right, Brazil's ambassador to Washington, Nestor Forster Jr., took Bolsonaro's son Eduardo, the head of the House Foreign Relations Committee, to the White House on the evening of January 5. Eduardo took a picture of Trump's daughter Ivanka holding his

newborn daughter Georgia.

Eduardo is a close associate of American fascist ideologue Steve Bannon. As for Forster, he has worked as a bridge between Bolsonaro and Trump loyalists. The conservative daily *Estado de S. Paulo* revealed that the ambassador has fed the Brazilian cabinet fabricated reports from the far-right, pro-Trump US media about fraud in the US elections in order to support Bolsonaro's alignment with Trump.

Bolsonaro was the last of the G20 leaders to recognize the victory of Democratic candidate Joe Biden. He waited until the Electoral College cast its votes on December 14 to congratulate Biden.

Bolsonaro is repeating allegations he has made for several years now that the Brazilian electronic voting system is unverifiable and inherently unsafe. These claims have been debunked several times by computer experts, with the Brazilian Army itself promoting "hacking competitions" to test the safety of the system. They found no security breaches enabling massive fraud.

Bolsonaro's main argument, made in outright bad faith, is that, by virtue of being electronic, the votes are not verifiable and cannot be recounted, and Brazil should adopt some sort of complementary print ballot to prevent fraud. Ignored in his allegations is that the ballot boxes are not connected to the internet, with votes being uploaded to the Electoral Court's internal server through private connections. Any breach of this system would require a massive attack on government servers which would be impossible to hide. Predictably, Bolsonaro has so far been unable to present a shred of evidence of what he claims was electoral fraud in 2018.

There was no doubt that, as the events at the US Capitol unfolded, the chief representatives of the Brazilian ruling class were reacting with nervous uncertainty about their own future. The preparations for a coup by Bolsonaro are no secret at this point to anyone. On January 7, as Bolsonaro doubled down on his support for Trump's coup, Maia made clear his full knowledge of the implications of Bolsonaro's remarks. He told the media that "Like Trump, it seems to me that Bolsonaro is a player who doesn't admit defeat and is now organizing an array of threats two years in advance."

These grave dangers notwithstanding, the overriding concern within the ruling class in Brazil is the same as that of its counterparts in the Democratic Party in the US and the governments of Europe, Asia and internationally: to prevent

workers from drawing the necessary conclusions from Bolsonaro's and Trump's threats to democracy and acting to fight against the system of which they are the necessary product, capitalism.

Like the representatives of the ruling class internationally, Brazil's political parties and corporate media are bending over backwards in singling out Trump and Bolsonaro as solely responsible for the massive crises engulfing the US and Brazil, effectively telling the public that "there is nothing to see here."

Estado de S. Paulo summed up the attitude of the ruling class towards the January 6 coup attempt in an editorial the next day: "The responsibility for what happened in Washington falls exclusively on Trump," concluding, "In the end, American democracy resisted the infamous attempted uprising encouraged by Trump." Its "progressive" rival *Folha de S. Paulo* also reassured its readers about Brazil on the next morning: "Also in Brazil, the system of checks and balances is containing a populist of authoritarian inclinations who sees in Trump an obvious source of inspiration."

In Rio de Janeiro, the mouthpiece of Brazil's largest media group, Globo, backhandedly admitted that the future of Bolsonaro's coup rests not with the "checks and balances" of Brazilian democracy, but rather with the Army. Its editorial stated: "The Constitution has already guaranteed us 33 consecutive years of democracy, a record in our Republic. One does not imagine that the Armed Forces as an institution will accept its shredding and going back to a distant past. On the contrary."

The three papers were enthusiastic collaborators of the blood-soaked 1964–1985 US-backed military dictatorship, and speak for a ruling class which has absolutely no interest in democratic rights, be it in Brazil or elsewhere. Their chief concern is to chloroform the public about the dangers of the present situation, and warn the ruling class not to allow its rifts with Bolsonaro, driven almost exclusively by differences over foreign policy, to spiral out of control.

Like Trump himself and another of their close allies, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, Bolsonaro faces the immediate threat of arrest for many corrupt practices as soon as he leaves office. These range from corruption schemes as a House member before becoming president, to possible involvement in the death squad murder of Rio de Janeiro Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) city councilor Marielle Franco in 2018.

The abortive coup of January 6 in Washington, and the social crisis shattering the social basis for democratic forms of rule in the US, are mirrored in Bolsonaro's own sadistic reaction to the social crisis in Brazil, which has entered an even more explosive phase with the new year.

January has seen the end of the emergency relief of R\$300 (US\$60) paid monthly to 68 million unemployed, informal sector and poor Brazilian workers, as well as the end of furlough schemes covering some 10 million workers employed in small, medium and large companies under the Brazilian Labor Code. Poverty is expected to immediately engulf 20 million Brazilians as of this month, with a total of 24 percent of the population falling below the poverty line as of January, up from 15 percent last year. The ranks of the unemployed, already consisting of 14 million workers,

are expected to double, as the jobless are forced to search for work with the end of emergency relief.

Meanwhile, Brazil is back to August levels of COVID-19 deaths, over a thousand a day, with ICU units filled to capacity in major cities and a new collapse of the mortuary system in the epicenter city of Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas.

On December 2, sociologist Roberto Barbosa of the Rio de Janeiro-based Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos (Iesp) made the headlines of Brazilian papers with a warning that "levels of social inequality will return to the figures of the 1980s," the decade that saw the industrial working class bring down the military dictatorship. In 1989, the decade closed with over 1,900 strikes, the largest number until 2013, when more than 2 million workers engaged in 2,057 strikes, marking the beginning of the decline of the then-ruling Workers Party (PT).

In response to such a situation, Bolsonaro is cultivating an ever more brazen indifference to the mass suffering of workers, canceling the purchase of syringes for COVID-19 vaccinations for being "too expensive," declaring publicly that the country is broken and he can't do anything about it, and that the unemployment figures are caused by "a good part of Brazilians not being prepared to do almost anything."

Under such conditions, mirroring the significant support for Trump's coup within the ruling class, even the unsubstantiated election fraud allegations by Bolsonaro may be viewed by the ruling class as a means of furthering a Bolsonaro coup. A recent PoderData survey showed that less than 15 percent of Brazilians believe the electronic ballot boxes are subject to fraud. Nonetheless, opposition candidate and frontrunner to succeed House Speaker Maia with the support of the PT, Luiz Felipe Baleia Rossi of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), declared on January 9 that the discussion over print ballots "will have to be held," providing a "democratic" cover for Bolsonaro's conspiracy theory.

It is urgent that Brazilian workers assimilate the lessons of the January 6 putsch in Washington and its global implications in order to prepare for coming struggles.



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